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### **COPING WITH DAKAR'S URBAN GROWTH**

by Yoro Sarr

SENEGAL, IDRC -- In Senegal, 30 percent of the population lives in cities. And the number of urban dwellers is increasing at the rate of six percent every year, partly as a result of the resident population's natural growth, but also because of the escalating rural exodus.

The proliferation of shanty towns, which threatened to choke Dakar, led to the establishment of a land-servicing program for a 350-hectare zone in the capital region. This program was initiated 12 years ago and is supported by the World Bank.

Today, 25,000 people live on the resulting 1837 serviced lots, and 2662 others are being prepared. Although many challenges are being met here, not all the problems have been eliminated. There are still many hurdles to cross.

The water supply for the lots comes from 37 public outlets. The commercial sector seems to be fulfilling its role effectively, considering the way in which markets, shops and production facilities have multiplied. However, retailers sell food to the highest bidder, a practice that sometimes inflates prices or causes shortages.

Although some people who live in the new community -- like Abdoulaye Diop, a taxi-driver -- say they are happy to be paying seven times less rent for 10 times more space, there are others who complain about transportation. Travel between the new community and the capital is such a problem that, even with

increased service, the two existing buslines cannot handle the flood of commuters. In addition, the national electricity company (SENELEC) is encountering difficulties as a result of the heavy demand in this area.

With respect to health care, some efforts have borne fruit. For example, there is a dispensary. Consultation tickets worth 100 CFA francs for an adult and 50 CFA francs for a child are issued so that medication can be purchased. Unfortunately, the receipts generated by these tickets (2000 to 3000 CFA francs per day) are too low to guarantee adequate supplies.

Field workers from the human development service instruct more than 70 women in an introductory household economics program. In cooperation with a nurse, they also offer a nutrition and health program financed with donations of grain from the American Peace Corps. Information on how to prepare and store cereal grains is provided, and mothers are trained in health care for themselves and their children. They are taught, for example, what precautions to take during and after pregnancy. This program has repercussions on the health of 500 children under five years of age.

Green spaces provided for in the original plan have not materialized and recreational facilities are almost nonexistent. There is no motion picture theatre, no youth or cultural centre. For a population used to the lively streets of Dakar, it is quite a change of scene.

The low population density held up several projects for a long time. A college (CEG) and some primary schools are ready but, for the time being, remain closed owing to a lack of students. Other projects, like the secondary school or cultural centre, were simply never begun.

The land-servicing program was undertaken in 1972 at an estimated cost of 3 billion CFA francs, one-third of which was to be contributed by Senegal and the other two-thirds by the World Bank. The objective of the program was to accommodate 140,000 lots.

To meet this objective, the households involved were to contribute to the financing of the housing so as to reduce the amount of public investment required, but with the government guaranteeing a level of service infrastructure that would help improve living conditions of the target populations.

However, program management had disastrous effects on development. The tendency to build once-and-for-all instead of gradually led to increased labour and construction material costs. In addition, participants in the program were selected from among the most needy and they had difficulty amassing the capital required to begin building their homes. This explains, in part, the program's slow progress. At the same time, the low occupancy rate delayed construction of collective facilities and cooled the enthusiasm of those who were preparing to move there.

Initially, there were no indications that such a situation could develop. The plan included mechanisms to encourage occupation of the sites by the most underprivileged, and candidates underwent a rigorous preliminary investigation to evaluate their income. Unfortunately, these investigations were not always carried out conscientiously. False declarations slipped through because of nepotism and corruption.

According to the program evaluation office (BEPA), there were seven cases of lots being allocated to at least two applicants at the same time.

Lack of capital also caused problems for the purchasers, whose contracts required development of the land within two years. Many preferred to resell their lots to wealthier purchasers.

Inflation has also had a particularly marked effect on the cost of construction materials. The price of a tonne of cement, for example, increased 458 percent in one decade and forced the program's administrators to index household revenues.

The income scale, originally 12,500 - 37,000 CFA francs, had to be increased to 15,500 - 50,000 CFA francs to take purchasers' solvency and their difficulties in developing the land into account.

Credit extended without the possibility of repayment being evaluated appears to be the main cause of the high default rate. Eighty-eight percent of the loans granted for construction and 30 percent of those granted for lots are not repaid when they are due. What is worse, a recent BEPA study demonstrated that 90 percent of purchasers did not know the risks they were running if they did not repay these loans. Eighty-three percent of the average purchaser's income is spent on food, water, electricity and transportation. The remaining 17 percent covers clothing, ceremonies (very expensive in Senegal), school supplies, medical expenses, loans, and so on.

Since 1979, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has been financing an evaluation of the project. This assistance has made it possible to set up a program evaluation office, which monitors progress on the project and carries out precise, targeted studies in order to provide solution to problems that arise.

In the last analysis, it must be said that the program has been a convincing success. The main concern now is to correct the errors made so far and to take them into account in other similar programs being implemented in the city of Thiès, east of Dakar, and in those being considered for Saint-Louis and Kaolack, as well as in a second plan being studied for the Senegalese capital.

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